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PARNASSUS
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Love Songs

Jared Towler

I

Love

Gentle kiss

or

I love my wife

So I don't smoke cigars in the house

So I don't wear the same shirt for five days

I still love all the firsts

The first girl I...

And the first girl who...

And the first girl that was...

The first girl who wouldn't

I loved her so much that it didn't bother me

That she was three inches taller than me

played football

And had sweaty palms

I cried in the back of a Rambler station wagon

In the arms of the one I really loved

But then again

All she ever wanted to do was French Kiss

I used to fall in love with them all

The stupid thing was

I used to tell them

Come on, all I want is a kiss

Love

Gentle kiss

II

A young lady told me she knows I have to be funny

or I'll be sad

She also told me she uses her body in the same way

or she'll be sad

Why don't we fuck and laugh together

It's better than being sad together

But I know that although our weaknesses

bring us close

We will never know each other in that way

For we know each other, already, too well

The Joke

by Jared Towler

I haven't been in this city for four years, not since I graduated from high school. I left amid tears and fists and general misunderstandings. I was looking then for what I am still looking for and know I'll never find. I don't know what my brother John thought of me when I left. He was never more than polite in the few times we'd met since then. Yet, I sincerely feel there was still love between us. I find it so hard to believe he's dead. How can he be dead; I'm so young.

We shared this room for eight years but it seems so alien now. Still, I could lie on this bed and sleep for 12 hours, like I used to then, when I had time to. I sit and wonder what I should be thinking. What is a person supposed to think on the day of his brother's funeral?

One particular day does come to my mind. It was about a year before I left. Today is the same kind of day, only different. It was a remembering day just like today. We lived in the country long ago, but that day I was 17, and living in this house, in the city. I was lying on the kitchen table in a city thenement and I could smell grass. Not the kind that tries to grow around the monuments in the parks downtown. I always feel bad for that grass. It remembers how tall it used to grow before we put our monuments there. Now, it can't even grow as high as my ankles because some municipal duty-doer always cuts it down as soon as it starts to breathe.

But that isn't what I started to say. No, the grass I smelled that day was the grass I remembered from the country, about 192 feet high and all colored yellow from the sun. I used to hide from rhinocerus in that grass. I think I even saw a pirate ship moving through it, far off, one day. Except it wasn't really that tall and the rest isn't exactly true either, but the grass in the country smelled like rhinos and pirates.

So I was just lying on the kitchen table, remembering, when I heard the front hall door open. I had to get off the table because my mother didn't want me on it, she said I got it dirty. I did it all the time, because I guess I knew if I got caught I would catch hell. Now that I live alone I never do it anymore, so I guess that's why.

I heard a stupid giggle from the hall so I knew it was my brother and I decided to take my time getting off the table. My brother was 19 years old and in college, and he still giggled. He also had another talent. He would tell my mother every dumb thing I said or did. This only added to her troubles because I was always doing dumb things. Of course, I thought I was pretty funny but I couldn't seem to find anyone to fully agree with me.

He had seen me on the table, so he proceeded to yell at me for a couple of centuries. Then he asked me if I would like to hear a new joke he had written. I gave him my father-of-seven-daughters-who-has-just-learned-that-his-wife-has-just-given-birth-to-a-baby-with-the-initials-J.R.-tattooed-on-his-forehead look.

"Sure," I said. "Sure, I've been waiting here all morning for you to come home and tell me your latest precious gem of humor."

I could see I had him just where I wanted him. He was standing there with intelligence oozing out of his ears.

"This is an intellectual joke," he informed me.

I started acting as if I was going to cry or wet my pants if I didn't hear that joke damn quick, so he let off with it.

"Why is the legendary cowboy's graveyard called Boot Hill?"

I looked at him with the blank expression of a window-shade. Obviously he was pleased. He made me whimper for a few minutes before he told me the answer. Of course, I wasn't really whimpering. I was always putting things over on him. Finally, when he thought I was pleading with my last breath, he held up his hands for silence, waited reverently for a couple of beats and said, "Because John Wilkes Boot is buried there."

You never saw such convulsions in your life as the ones I went into when I heard that. I told him that was his best joke yet, and I meant it. I tried to get him to send it to Reader's Digest and get a couple of bucks for it, but he said he didn't want to be bothered.

I offered to buy it from him and finally I had to pay him two cents for it. Two cents which he demanded on the spot. He left and I went racing all over the house to find a Reader's Digest so I could find out where to send the joke.

I don't know what happened, a telephone call, an interesting TV program, but I soon forgot about the joke. It's

funny that now, when I should be thinking about all the things we did together and all the talks we had, the one thing that I remember most about him is that joke. It says nothing about who my brother John was, but that one joke seems to represent him, in my mind, better than all the words and tears of a lifetime.

Mr. Johnson

by Jared Towler

When I was young I lived with my family in a three story tenement in Lawrence, Mass. We lived on the first floor, the third floor was empty, and Mr. Johnson lived on the second. Mr. Johnson was our landlord and we watched over him when his son wasn't visiting. One thing my brothers and I used to do was take turns bringing food up to him. Usually he only ate beans and bread and drank beer or coffee, but once or twice a week my mother would fix an extra plate for him and send one of us boys up with it.

The stairs were brown and dirty and quickly turned a corner that put us into Mr. Johnson's floor and world. Above our heads were hugh holes in the ceiling. The rotten condition of the wood prohibited anyone from living on the third floor. Mr. Johnson's door was brown too, and was made of heavy oak which didn't really seem to open on hinges but seemed more like a huge rock, pulled across a cave opening.

I would hold the warm plate of food in one hand and knock very softly. From inside I could hear him start to move as he would yell out, "Who's there?" as if hundreds of visitors were constantly knocking at his door.

At the time, I thought he was very old, but I have since learned that he was only very sick, and required two or three very long minutes to get out of his chair and cross to the door. As he opened it, the nose of his little brown dog would be the first thing I would see. I tried never to look directly at Mr. Johnson's face because he had a tumor on his forehead. After he put down the plate he had taken, he would reach to a shelf above the stove for an old brown nickel. That's what most impressed me about visiting Mr. Johnson; the old brown nickel he would always give me. Just by being in his presence, a shiny new nickel became brown; brown like everything else this side of the stairs.

After I left I would run down the stairs into the greens and blues of a house full of kids and run fast. It was all right to be with him but horribly scary on the way back down those stairs.

Untitled #I

by Richard DiNatale

I am this body.

pink flesh cavity and

blood crossing in the deepness

subways aflame and forgotten.

Looking downward, my flesh stretches fluidly;

like topsoil over rocks

/ a secret valley here

an unknown angle there /

I squeeze hard my dirty fists (now like some new dug potato)

I am waiting for my feet to sprout roots

to the earth,

for a new substance to rise up.

For the earth to surrender its gifts

to me.

The red tunnels pump up warm blood

like the sap of trees, drawn by the hot sun

Beneath the bark other secrets inhabit my wood and

tangled roots drive downward isolate riddles

I am waiting to sprawl speechlessly, branching

recklessly along the soil.

Loam feet in soft communion with flesh

long since buried.

I am this body, rooted, open like a book

fluttering pages for the sun.

My Grandfather's Hands

by Rick Battistini

Physically speaking, he was a little man. On the tallest day he ever stood, he was never more than five feet three weighing about one hundred and forty pounds. But he was to me, and to all who knew him, a giant. Every inch of him was solid muscle. His hands were gnarled with the strength that comes from making bread by hand for over fifty years. Muscles in fore-arms and biceps and shoulders were like tautly-pulled piano wire, from lifting hundred pound bags of flour and wooden trays filled with sweet smelling fresh dough, hand-rolled into loaves, ready for the heat of the brick oven. For many years, the bread was shoveled into the oven on long paddles, by hand; another reason for the strength in arms you thought would crush the breath right out of you when there was reason for an exuberant Italian hug.

Those hands that shaped nourishment for so many people, over so many years were the hands of my grandfather; now dead for almost a year.

Standing by his casket, I didn't want to look at his face. In the still, un-naturalness of death, he didn't look like himself. Instead, my eyes were riveted to those hands, now quietly in repose, clasped on his chest with his worn, black-beaded rosary held in them. I could see the scarred, still swollen knuckles. These came from the years of boxing and prize fights he so loved as a young man. How many times he told us all about this sport and what a hero he was at a hundred and eighteen wiry pounds becoming the Merrimack Valley Champ in his class. I have a gold pocket watch he won as a prize engraved with his name and the date. A small man, yes, but he must have been a tiger!

I saw also the broken fingers, never properly mended, from the time his hand got caught in a new bakery machine which cut and shaped the dough. How he hated the new mechanization invading his private domain. "People want to know that I made the bread, not some damn machine that fills the loaf with air." His business was expanding and machinery was the price of progress.

He remembered going from one house to another, of the new Italian immigrants, bringing warm, crisp, single sticks of bread in a horse-drawn buggy with his father. The quaint neighborliness of that period, his diminutive size and his pleasant, outgoing personality made him a community favorite. He thrived on the warm and loving response he got from people. Soon his little hands were big enough to hold the reins, as he and a brother a year older, made all the bread deliveries. While in their late teens, their father died, suddenly, and these two became the bread makers and bread winners, for their widowed mother and eight younger brothers and sisters.

Those hands became responsible hands; producing, giving, sharing, dispensing punishment as a father would, when little brothers and sisters needed it, and caressing and consoling when that was needed.

Meanwhile, every night, in the frigid cold of winter, as in the humid swelter of summer, the bread dough was made, loaves were shaped, baked, and delivered to homes where Fantini bread was indeed the staff of life.

In his mid-twenties, my grandfather met and courted a neighborhood Lithuanian beauty. In those days of sharp ethnic distinction, nationalities married their own kind. Their marriage in 1925 was one of the barrier shattering firsts as the Baltic and the Mediterranean cultures merged.

Never relinquishing his role as father figure for his mother and younger brothers and sisters, he now took on another family. During the dark depression days which soon followed he also assumed respon-

sibility for his new wife and his father-in-law. All told, the two brothers were the sole support of their mother, eight younger brothers and sisters, their own wives, several in-laws, and of course their own children were soon to follow. This staggering assortment was fed, clothed, educated, and somehow cared for during the poorest days our country has ever known.

Times were unbelievably hard. Jobs and money were scarce. Good customers and neighbors, who now needed bread more than ever, were carried on credit; they paid how and when they could. Oftentimes the bread-man would receive payment in the form of a chicken, fresh vegetables, a bit of needed carpentry, or a housewife might sew a dress or knit a child's sweater; it was an honest time, and everyone trusted the other to pay when and how he could. The flour company carried the baker and the baker carried his neighbors and good customers. They all received their daily bread and the valiant little baker and his business survived.

No one had a great deal, but no one starved. Families and neighbors shared and made the best of those terrible times. Prohibition was in effect but when the bakers could get hops and malt beer was made; happy times were celebrated with this "home-brew" and of course the good red wine made every Fall from the neighborhood's choicest grapes.

Saturday morning marked the end of the baker's week. Saturday night, the only night they didn't work, was for family and social get-togethers: card playing, bocce, and loud argumentative political discussions. Plenty of spaghetti and wine, with pizza and tonic for the kids. Everywhere, Italian hands gesticulated. An uncle would give a loving pinch to a cheek that would carry a black and blue bruise for a week. A hug and a lift off the floor was worth two roller-coaster rides in speed and height. The hand signals in a card game spoke a language all their own. If you misbehaved, a crack came out of nowhere, and always, I can see in my

mind's eye as my mother recounted these times to me, my grandfather's hands, making, doing, showing, and loving.

Before the Depression was over, my grandfather had three children, all daughters. To such an athletic man, and one who wanted an heir for his growing business, a house full of women must have seemed an unkind blow. But as he never complained about anything, so he never complained about the lack of a son. My mother recalls that instead he would talk of what fine son-in-laws he would have, and of what wonderful grandsons the future had waiting for him.

Sunday morning was given to keeping holy the Sabbath. Religion was a very important part of his life, and as the Church took care of their spiritual needs, so they took care of her. Even as you supported your family, so you were expected to support your priest and your good nuns, and participate actively in the life of your church. There were suppers, dances, and shows, missions and lectures, all nurturing a sense of community and a religious commitment. There wasn't a religious organization which my grandfather wasn't President of at one time or another. Ethnic clubs and political groups knew his leadership too.

These Italians, for the most part, were skilled workers. They stitched in the shoe factories, molded shoe counters, laid brick, and worked in cement, or wove cloth in the factories. They lacked formal education and this became an important goal for them to acquire for their children.

Soon, as my mother and her sisters grew to girlhood, World War II came upon the country. Mixed with the sorrow of losing sons to military service, the nation's economy boomed. Things got better and old bills were paid. The bakers had cash in hand for the first time in a long while. The flour companies were paid, new mixers to make bigger batches of dough were bought, new trucks delivered the bread.

As the young left to fight for their country, their elders kept things going at home. The little Italian community had grown and

they were an ethnic force to be reckoned with. They elected political and union leaders. They demanded and received improved city services such as street lights, better schools and playgrounds. The social clubs began to realize their voting power and local and state candidates came courting the Italian vote. Soon they realized they should run their own candidates.

My grandfather's family of dependents were growing to adulthood during this period of time. His brothers went to war, and the sisters were either being educated or were working, or were married and had started families of their own. As his family responsibilities decreased he became more involved in civic and church leadership. He sat on various municipal boards and committees. Service to others became his life's work, along with the nightly baking. Although he worked twelve hours a day in the bakery, from eight in the evening to eight in the morning, he still managed to devote a good portion of his day to his neighbors and community. In those days, before social agencies existed, people with problems went to a leader in their area for assistance and direction. Maybe they wanted to take out citizenship papers, or place a retarded child in the proper school. Sometimes there were state tests to be arranged for, in plumbing or contracting. Sometimes families had come on hard times and needed welfare help. My grandfather helped them all to the extent that his wife scolded he was not at home enough; he would reply, "I'm doing God's work." In his own small way I'm sure he was.

His three daughters grew to adulthood in the care of these strong, loving hands which insisted on good character, good marks, a college education, and a respect and concern for the community which had nurtured them. After the War college became a reality for many in the Italian community through the G.I.Bill; they began to realize the hope that their children could become doctors, lawyers, dentists, and teachers...professions which had been exclusively reserved for the "Yankees."

My mother was the first one in the entire family to graduate from college. She became a teacher in Haverhill, and every time my grandfather referred to her as "my daughter the school-teacher" pride swelled in him; another daughter became a secretary and the youngest too became a teacher. They all married, and the joy and pleasure of sons was now complete. My grandfather always said that if he could have hand-picked three men for his daughters to marry, those were the ones he would have chosen. In typical Italian over-dramatization, he would say that his girls with wisdom acquired from him had chosen the handsomest, the smartest, and the very best men, who would as the best flour makes the best bread give to him the best grandchildren God ever made.

Into this loving and waiting family I was born, the first grandchild and the first grand-son. My mother tells me of a celebration that lasted all night at the bakery and jeopardized bread-making for the entire Easter week-end. My birth at Easter-time held special significance for the religious man who saw in the time that commemorates the risen Christ and the earth's Spring renewal, a new opportunity for the Fantini family to serve God and man.

I was lucky to have wonderful parents and this wonderful grandfather for eighteen and a half years. I saw this dear man almost every day of my life. His interest in sports, politics, people and ideas were to become interests of my own. That I was named for him, and looked like him, even though he had three other grandsons in short order, made me as proud as it made him. To anyone brought up without this kind of special love from a very special person, I offer my sympathy.

Now there are only memories, and they are many, rich and beautiful.. My favorite memory is of him at Sunday dinner, surrounded by his grandchildren. In his time-worn hands is held a piece of bread which he uses to punctuate his conversation, as well as to eat his favorite food. The hands help feed the youngest and ruffle the hair and pinch the cheeks of all others. The hands are quick

to reach into a pocket for a little extra money, and just as quick to give a pat on the back for some scholastic or athletic honor received.

When this giant's heart failed, the outpour of love from the community which he had served so well will always remain a remembered tribute. The funeral home was thronged with people whose lives he had touched. The church was more crowded with people than it is on Sunday. Priests, who had known his help and friendship, con-celebrated a Mass where friends from all walks of life said farewell to the little baker who was such a beloved representative of his people. Many shook my hand and reminded me of my good fortune in having such a grandfather, and as the tears flowed, priests eulogized him as a man who did indeed do "God's work."

I could only hope that somehow he knew how much he had meant to so many people. The tribute would have pleased him.

Wall Street Sonnet

"Dow-Jones off 13.6 as Agnew Quits."

(Headline in Wall Street Journal,
October 11, 1973)

Come Dow! Come Jones! Brace up, old boys take heart.
The ship of state has weathered fiercer blows.
Our fearless skipper still will do his part
To keep us from the shoals, though heaven knows
It must be tough to man the helm (just think!)
Through waters mined with obstacles galore
Like Watergate, Clemente, Ellsberg's shrink,
A Veep he couldn't trust to mind the store.
Six Crises now have grown to seventeen,
Through all he's never cried, "Abandon Ship!"
In fact, perhaps, his greatest worry's been
The perspiration on his upper lip.

Ye mammon's slaves no longer need feel sick
Gold still is king, his regent: Tricky Dick.

Robert Dalton

What's New, Dear?

How in the hell can you ask me what's new!
I don't get out of this house like you.
You must know what I have to do.
From morning till night.

My life is the same monotonous round
Of housework and children and things that will sound
To a more worldly listener as a life that is bound
By the petty and trite.

The trash men didn't pick up today
The wind blew the old newspapers away
The whole damned street is in disarray.
Isn't that exciting?

I unfroze the roast for dinner tonight,
Chilled the wine, played some music, prepared candlelight.
The dog jumped up and took a huge bite.
Doesn't it look inviting?

You can eat or not, whichever you choose,
While I continue to give you the news
Of a day in the life of a woman whose views
Are simple and not historical.

So eat and I'll be glad to relate
The news for which you eagerly wait.
If you're just fishing, I'm taking the bait.
Or was your question rhetorical?

The children, or course, did their usual part
To darken my day and harden my heart.
(Eat your roast beef, just skip the part
That Sambo chewed.)

Lesley and Joyce went early to bed
With a rash on their faces, pimply and red.
Poison Oak I suspect. Oh, the post on our bed
Came unglued.

Amy got punched in the eye by a brat
Who felt (mistakenly I'm told) that
Amy had put a dead frog in his hat,
Causing the fight.

Rob's dome sent a bill for breakage again.
Dan can fly home if we send him a ten.
Michaela called too, Anne has been
Crying all night.

The rest of my day has been thrillingly spent
In washing and ironing and not giving vent
To the rage that's built up since the moment you went.
Aren't you through eating yet?

So that's all the news that I have to tell.
Now you might as well go watch your damned N.F.L.
Cause you'll get more real lovin' from Howard Cosell
Than from me tonight, my pet.

Robert Dalton

Notes of a Negligent Mnemonist

I'm a prodigious note-taker. At some time in my past, some effective teacher, whose name I can't recall (probably because I didn't write it down) must have impressed me with the value of making written notes of anything I wanted to remember. As a consequence, my desk is littered with notes and the pockets of my jackets, shirts and trousers are stuffed with them. The drawback to this habit is that, through disuse, the memory becomes rusty and is practically unable to retain facts, instructions or directions without the assistance of these scribbled reminders. Even worse unless the instructions in the notes are acted upon promptly, the notes become so cryptic in a few days as to be meaningless. Periodically, I do a house-cleaning and try to decipher the old notes, making a new list of the instructions contained in the ones I can decode, then, reluctantly, discarding the ones whose meanings are hopelessly obscure. It's cleaning time.

The first one reads, "Roll ruby to North Andover." The "roll" may refer to a roll of newsprint paper. And we do have a couple of customers in North Andover, one of them another printer. But "ruby" baffles me. I can't make the connection. All that comes to mind is a vision of myself rolling a fat, black lady down the middle of Route 125 to North Andover. Into the waste-paper basket.

"75 miles. Griffin, Larkin, Brando." Seems easy at first. The 75 miles must be for my expense record. Logical too, since Griffin and Larkin are both customers in Boston. But what is Brando doing in such company? Did I hope to get through with Griffin and Larkin early and catch at least a few of the livelier scenes in "Last Tango?" I've always admired Brando's work, except for his simpering Fletcher Christian in "Mutiny on The Bounty," (Having seen Gable in this part, I felt Brando's interpretation a blasphemy.) Enough nostalgia! What could Brando have to do with Griffin and Larkin? Sounds as incongruous as Merrill Lynch, Pierce, Fenner, Smith, Simon and Garfunkle. Unless I was daydreaming of Tahiti, Brando's home. No, I've had it with Pacific islands. To the trash.

Here's a longer one, "I miss the smell of burning leaves this fall." That one's clear enough. A poem I wanted to write. My head was full of ideas for that one -- the pleasant smell, the haze of an autumn evening, ubiquitous green turning to flame, children sloshing through leaf-filled gutters; then some pompous beaurecrat equating the smell of leaf smoke with the noxious fumes of automobiles and factories and as a result of his olfactory deficiency banning their burning, ending with a

plea to restrain him before he anathematizes the many other pleasing aromas which I could then enumerate. I tossed the words and phrases in the air and they landed at my feet, a meaningless jig-saw puzzle which I've given up trying to assemble. I'll wait till Spring. Maybe the next seasonal change will bring a more coherent inspiration.

"Bread, butter, beer, butts." My 5 PM shopping list with an unintentional, but rather cute, alliteration. Cute or not, it's obsolete. Into the circular file.

"I'd give my right arm to be ambidextrous." The last of my collection of slogans copied from bumper stickers; slogans which I felt, at the time of my note-taking, to be original and humorous. Inevitably in a few days, the same sticker would blossom out on every other Volkswagon, losing much of its pungency through repetition. I guess the longevity record of three weeks belongs to, "Jesus Saves -- But Esposito Scores On The Rebound!"

This is ridiculous. A grown man playing with all these scraps of paper like a little girl with her cut out dolls. I'm sure I could avoid this if I could only train my memory to retain these bits of information -- or better still, to discriminate between what is important and should be memorized and what could be discarded. I swear, starting tomorrow, I won't write notes. I'll force myself to remember the things I must. I'm determined to beat this habit. Starting tomorrow morning. I'll write myself a reminder right now.

Robert Dalton

The incident recounted in the following narrative surfaced from the depths of my memory after reading John Updike's excellent short story, "A.&P." Rather than risk the charge of plagiarism, I will acknowledge my debt to Mr. Updike before relating my experience with

THE HOME READING SERVICE

by Robert Dalton

Some years ago, when my family was smaller but growing and my income was smaller and not growing, I often found it necessary to supplement my modest salary by moonlighting. I drove cabs, packed trucks in a cookie factory, did landscape gardening and hot-topping, sold Fuller Brush products; in fact, I did anything, short of stealing, which would help defray the cost of what I considered to be the necessities for my family. The luxuries would have to wait for a brighter day. Besides the immediate benefit of keeping the bill-collectors away from the door, these jobs taught me the valuable lesson that there are many good, intelligent and even potentially creative people who are forced by circumstances to spend their lives at dull, repetitive, demeaning tasks and that it is neither charitable nor wise to belittle any man for the type of work he must perform. As the poet so properly admonishes, "Mock not their humble toil, their destiny obscure." But this moral has nothing to do with my story. It just occurred to me in passing.

Ironically, in my efforts to keep one step ahead of the collectors, one of the positions I secured was that of collector for the Home Reading Service. In a display of the naivete which I have hopefully outgrown, I had responded to an ad in the local paper reading, "Earn up to \$50 a week in your spare time. Car necessary. No selling." The last part of the ad especially appealed to me since I had recently severed my connection with the Fuller Brush Company, certain finally that salesmanship was not my forte.

The following day the district manager of the company, a Mr. Victor Basbanas, called on me. He spent the better part of two hours enlightening me to the valuable function performed by the Home Reading Service, the excellent opportunities available for advancement in that organization and the responsibility that would be reposed in me if, after his investigation, I was fortunate enough to be taken on their team. (Throughout this rather one-sided interview, he exhibited an unfortunate, and I'm sure unconscious mannerism which prompted my two young sons -- with the indelicacy typical of their age and sex -- to nickname him "Vic-pick-your-nose.") Eventually he did get around to asking me for

information relating to my experience, references, and for a statement of the particular qualifications I felt I possessed which would be valuable to his company. I gave him a spiel which I had quite well perfected over many years of job interviews. He was non-committal but promised to return in a few days with his decision.

True to his word, Vic returned in three days after apparently determining that I did not frequent the race track and had neither kept a mistress nor absconded with any company funds. He congratulated me on being accepted for the position of collector for the Home Reading Service, adding excitedly that he was assigning me to a "choice territory."

At this point, a digression would appear to be in order to explain just what function the Home Reading Service does perform. The Service is a clearing-house (or more aptly a "clearing office" since it occupies one office in the Park Square Building) for magazine subscriptions. The company engages a large number of part-time salesmen, many of the eager-beaver college students, to entice their prey into buying subscriptions for groups of magazines, sometimes as many as six to one customer, for a price considerably lower than newsstand price. Usually the discount is in the form of a year's free subscription after paying the full price for two or three years. The salesman extracts as much as he can as a down-payment and anything up to \$10 on an account is his commission. The company then employs collectors, whose ranks I had now joined, to call on the accounts once a month and pick up the pro-rated payments. The collector keeps thirty percent of whatever money he collects. About twenty collectors work under the supervision of a district manager, who takes ten percent of everything collected as an "override." The Home Reading Service then takes its cut and whatever is left is remitted to the publisher. This whole arrangement could lead one to question the efficiency of a system in which the cost of a product is inflated four times before it passes from producer to customer. But I digress too far. Verbosity, as well as hearing loss and varicose veins, is one of the hazards of aging.

In any case, I was now a collector. I had a stack of about four hundred cards, or accounts, averaging about \$1.50 due on each one monthly. Thus if I collected every one I would have brought in \$600, of which \$180 would be mine. Great! I quickly calculated that I could make fifteen calls a night for five nights, then make twenty-five calls on Saturday, and be \$45 a week richer. Did I say naive? To be honest, stupid is what I was.

I soon learned that of my four hundred accounts, perhaps one third were "sure pays" on the first visit. Another one third required at least two, and sometimes three visits in order to find anyone home or someone sufficiently solvent (in my "choice territory") to afford \$1.50. The remaining third were, at least as far as I was concerned, completely uncollectible. So much for easy money! I wasn't completely discouraged however. I could still average

thirty-five dollars a week which was satisfactory as long as I didn't reflect on the fact that I was earning only about forty or fifty cents an hour.

At the end of each month the collectors were required to send in a check for the company's share of the money collected, together with all cards -- for both collected and uncollected accounts. When I mailed off my package after the first month I was sure that a quick glance at the stack of uncollected cards would lead to my immediate dismissal. Surprisingly, however, in a few days the cards came back to me. No letter of reprimand. No call from Vic. Off I went again to collect, first, my easy one-third, then to spend two weeks on the second category, and finally during the last week of the month, at the urging of my conscience, to try a few of the rugged ones -- with little or no success.

I followed the same unvarying routing for three months with no repercussions from the home office or from Vic and I was beginning to feel that the Home Reading Service ran a rather loose ship. My fool's paradise was due for a shake-up.

It came one evening as we were finishing dinner. A telephone call. Vic, for me.

"Paul! Listen buddy, we're gettin' a little worried about you. Your stack of 'no pays' is gettin' bigger every month. Y'know I stuck my neck out to get you this job cuz I kinda thought you were my type of guy, but I ain't about to get my ass in a sling cuz you're too goddam lazy to go after the tough ones. Now, whaddaya gonna do about it?" (Vic was not one to skirt an issue.)

"As a matter of fact, Vic, I had planned to get out tonight and go after a bunch of the really delinquent accounts." (As a matter of fact, I had planned to have a short nap, a romp with the kids, a couple of highballs and whatever small pleasures the rest of the night might offer.)

"Well good! Cuz I'm goin with ya. It's about time I saw how ya operate anyway. I'll be over ya house in a half hour." Click.

Prompt as usual, Vic was at the door in twenty minutes. When his first words as he stomped through the doorway were, "Where's ya cards?" I could tell, with my customary perceptiveness, that it wouldn't be wise to offer him a drink. I gave him the cards, he riffled through them twice, flipped them back to me and said, "Okay, pick out the dead-beats." For effect I started to finger through the cards one at a time, then thinking "To hell with it!" I dislodged the bottom third of the stack and handed it to him. Vic took them with a knowing grin then fanned them out on the table.

"Okay buster. One time. One time, I'm gonna show ya how ta get som loot outta these bastards. Then it's up ta you. You send these goddam cards in just one more month with no dough and you've had it! Now, let's see. I know this route. Choice territory. No goddam reason why you can't collect these. Here's three close together. We'll start with these. Aiken Street."

My God! Aiken Street! Could Vic be serious? If this were choice territory, what would average be? For that matter, what would prime be? My town has very few presentable neighborhoods and Aiken Street is far removed from any of them. Mainly it's a collection of run-down, three and four-tenement blocks, many of them vacant and condemned, varied occasionally by an empty lot littered with debris. Well, I'd play along. To Aiken Street, then, in Vic's car.

We stopped at number seventy-six, a four-storey tenement, painted a dull grey with a black shutter or two still hanging on a few windows, a pathetic window-box of floweres here and there offering the only contrast to the hopelessly drab exterior of the building. Vic grabbed part of the cards and lurched from the car.

"Okay. Gendron. Fourth floor. Buck sixty a month. Let's go."

I trotted at his heels trying to remember making this call before. Then it came to me. I had called here twice in my first month on the job. Mrs. Ronald Gendron. I remember now. I remembered she told me both times she was sorry but she didn't have the money. Polite. Not nasty. No evasions or excuses, she just didn't have the money. I remembered I had seen at least three small children although she appeared to be under thirty. I remembered her apartment had looked clean and neat inside in contrast to the decrepitude outside and the mess of the stairway. I remembered a strikingly beautiful face but showing premature lines. But chiefly I remembered her eyes.

They were brown. Big and round and dark, dark brown. Probably because of the attraction of opposites, brown eyes have always turned me on. My Irish ancestors, with their discriminatory genes, bequeathed to me, as well as my brothers, sisters, cousins, uncles and aunts, uniformly bland, unimpressive light blue eyes. Thankfully, and given my predilection, inevitably, my wife has beautiful brown eyes and two of my children are similarly endowed. And Mrs. Ronald Gendron, I remembered, had brown eyes.

At this point in my reverie we had reached the second landing after dodging an assortment of toys and garbage. Vic was still racing ahead of me, puffing and mumbling to himself. He stopped now for a breath, glancing briefly at the card. "What the hell does she take anyway. Humpty Dumpty. For the kids. House Beautiful. Jeezus H. Christ! House Beautiful in this friggin dump!" The pause ended, we prepared to assault the next two flights of stairs.

Both winded, we finally made the fourth floor. We stopped at the door to the flat and Vic leaned over and whispered, "Now you watch this, and watch good. I'm gonna show you how it's done this time. The next time, you're on your own." Then he knocked on the door. A short pause, then a male voice, distant but clear, "Whoever it is, tell 'em we don't want none!" Footsteps, the knob turned, the door opened. Mrs. Ronald Gendron, her arm around a smaller Gendron resting on her left hip, his brown eyes a miniature reproduction of hers, a glimmer of recognition as she glances at

me but a look of bewilderment at Vic. Vic speaks.

"Mrs. Gendron?"

"Yes."

"Good evening. Sorry to bother you at this hour. I'm Mr. Basbanas of the Home Reading Service. I'm making a routine check of Mr. Hardy's accounts and apparently, through some misunderstanding, Mr. Hardy hasn't collected from you for the past three months. Uhh, let's see, that will be three months at \$1.60. That will be \$4.80 please Mrs. Gendron."

"I'm sorry, I just don't have the money."

"I'm sorry as hell too, Mrs. Gendron, but that just don't cut no ice with me. Sorry don't pay the rent, as we say. You signed this contract, we've lived up to our part, now it's up to you to live up to yours."

"Can't you please just cancel the magazines and I'll try to pay you the part I owe you as soon as I can?"

"No way lady! This is a valid, legal, perfectly bona-fide contract. Do you want us to bring the law in? Do we have to slap an attachment on you husband's pay? Do you want us to get an order to remove the furniture to pay this contract? Do you want us to disgrace you forever, ruin your credit, give your kids a bad name for the rest of their lives?"

Dear God! The brown eyes flitted from Vic to me in desperation. Why didn't he stop! Was this all for my education? Or was he enjoying it? And why didn't the lout in the other room come out and throw us both down the stairway?

Her head bowed slightly. The brown eyes lidded over. In a voice almost wistful but defeated, she whispered, "All right. Wait a minute." Mrs. Ronald Gendron with her burden trudged back towards a room in the rear of the flat. Vic turned to me, grinned and winked. The blood rushed to my pale face (another bequest from my gaelic progenitors) and I tried to control the urge to vomit.

We heard a jiggling of metal against glass and the sound of coins dropping on the floor, then silence. Mrs. Ronald Gendron returned, still carrying the child, her right hand extended.

"I have \$1.60. I can pay one month."

Vic took the money, handed it to me, and continued.

"That'll help lady. But you're still behind, and Mr. Hardy here will be back next week, and the week after that, and the week after that until your account is up to date. And believe me it better be caught up soon. We know how to deal with people like you."

The coins were burning my palm but I couldn't put them in my pocket. I had finally made my decision. I reached over and put the coins in Mrs. Ronald Gendron's hand and closed her fingers on them. The brown eyes stared at me still not understanding. I turned to Vic, handed him the cards I was holding, and muttered, "I quit."

I stumbled down the stairs, tears distorting the obstacles, salt rising in my throat. I was half-way down before Vic realized what was happening, then I could hear his voice catching up with me.

"What the fuck's eating you? You flipped or something? Naaah... I know. You got no balls. You're a fuckin' dreamer, a book-reader. You're soft as shit! You and your kind'll never amount to a damn. Good riddance, you chicken bastard!"

I ran out into the street and gulped the cool night air. I wanted to run back up and smash my fist into Vic's face, to drive my knee into his groin. I wanted to knock on Mrs. Ronald Gendron's door and tell her how sorry I was, tell her to forget the damned contract, tell her not to give up, tell her she'd have that rambling white house in the suburbs some day with a stupid Dalmation sprawled in front of the fireplace.

But I didn't. I started walking home.

naughty, naught e.e.

if
 fat
handsbang rags
 e.e.
? what of
skinny fingersand
 limp
 wrist,
thats
 far
too
 generalBud.

Kevin Lavallee

Drunk
on mondaynight.

Bowie sings
stinged faggottenor:
Slinger glasses
need filling

my
glass is
spilling
theguys
are
laughing
while beer drips
like
overheated wax on the floor

Girls
slide
by and
i grab them with
my eye
retina
racing to discover
before they notice,
each curve
finished
and another
walks
by... smoke
floating
past my fingers
wrapping around
and
disappearing

Kevin Lavallee

NO GREATER LOVE

Bert McKenney

Rene died loving
 six men
 who burned her.
Burned her, man, like a mother-fuckin' torch.

The brightest thing in Roxbury,
 that night,
 man.
Brighter than the sun, the moon, the stars.

Sixty jillion candlepower, man.

Shit!

When these dudes hassled her she went right over
man and rapped and said like she wasn't their
oppressor but shit horizontal hatred wasn't
listening and they made her empty that old gas
can all over herself and then they tossed a
lighted match at her. Shit!

But how else could she
 complete her
 life's journey, and,
Dying, tell the cops to cool it
 and not lay any charges
 on them?

Christ on the cross!

Cool, man, no?

Then why am I cryin' so?

-end-

EVELYN (RENE) WAGLER, died 2 October 1973, aged 24

When Cathy Walked Home Through the Swamp

A part of me wanted to scold.
The part that changes the beds,
Checks clocks and thermometers,
Cooks Cream of Wheat on cold mornings
And folds away clothes.

The very idea!
Walking through water and mud!
To ruin whatever you're wearing.
The very best way I can think of, in spring,
To catch winter cold.

But the part of me that stands on the porch
And waits for spring peepers for weeks,
That stands beneath budding branches
Laughs at the wading grackles
And longs to join the small-frog chorus,
That part said.
Good! Good for you, child.
Walk in the swamp
For all the springs of your life
And take joy.

Eleanor B. Campbell

Welcome to a Toad

Hi there, Toad, we're glad you seek your shelter
Here each spring before the grass grows green;
Unlike those creatures settling helter-skelter,
You seem to live by plan and strict routine.

We see you hunting beetles in the morning,
At noon you nap, enjoying midday sun,
At night you're setting traps without a warning,
We wonder when your working day is done.

But, when it rains, you sit in sweet abandon,
Completely loving rain and getting rained on.

Eleanor B. Campbell

The Night Dorothy Died

"...while he was away, William
Bradford's wife, Dorothy,
had fallen from the Mayflower
and drowned, although the
ship had been lying quietly
at anchor at the time."

"The Pilgrims and Plymouth
Colony"

The Stars the only things I know
In a strange world.
I came here alone to pray,
But Prayer does not freely come.
Tonight I am truly Separatist
And even from God.

I believed in the Journey.
And came of my own free will.
And yet, my soul has been haunted
These many weeks, nay, months,
By the sound of a small boy's voice.
(It was right to leave him in Leyden;
I fear for the children in winter).
But I never had thought to miss him so.

I cannot stray.
Nor yet betray
The women, sleeping below with their children
The men, this very night in the wilderness
Seeking a settling place.

Oh, Lord, I am wicked and weak.
Or possessed.
And in Truth and in Shame do confess
How I long to hear horses clop-clopping on stone,
The sweet, sweet sheltering village bells,
Even the bustle of bakers in predawn Dutch ovens,
And idle gossip in English shops.

How calm the sea!
The stars reflect,
Beckon like lights across the moor.
Our Father, Who Art in Heaven,
Pray, let it appear to the brethren
That it was a fall.

Eleanor B. Campbell

My Short Life as a Fullerette
by C.R. Hunter

How many of us have had dealings with door to door sales people ? We all have a stereotype of a so-called "bell ringer": effervescent, toothy smile, radiating confidence, and as aggressive as a Mongul hord. Once this person's foot is in the door we usually end up with the whole body, display case and all. Well, I found myself seriously contemplating doing the same thing. When you are so broke that you are even out of staples like Table Talk Pies just about any job looks good. To alleviate the monetary crisis I became a Fuller Brush Sales Lady, known in the business as a Fullerette.

Ringling door bells had never been uppermost in my mind, never mind the actuality of walking up to a duplex, sub-divided into apartments, and having to figure out which bell out of six got whom. Not only did I have to fight off the stereotyped image but I had to deal with my own uneasiness. As far as the stereotype goes I might qualify on the toothy grin but not the rest; I was scared and felt like I had become a walking invasion of privacy. Assured of making a small fortune and thinking that the job would not interfere with school, I set off to sell Fuller Brush products. The products are good and do tend to sell themselves to life-long Fuller customers. Unfortunately, there are quite a few people around who would not open the door to Santa Claus, never mind a fledging Fullerette trained by "Marilyn" books. For the uninitiated, "Marilyn" books are a series of four magazines designed to show the new Fullerette how to go about making millions, selling Fuller products. The magazines are writtten at the intellectual level of a thirty year old sixth grader, which they attempt to pass off as the average housewife's mental range. This may not

trouble some people but it did leave me wondering if American womanhood was really that lacking or if the Company just liked to think they were. I have had a chance to meet some of our country's housewives, their families, and see their homes. They have ranged from being well-off mentally and financially, to being crippled by poverty and their own lack of ability to deal with today's technical society. The homes went from a decorator's dream to a slum lord's masterpiece of negligence. Some individuals made me feel at home with coffee and doughnuts while others peered over their chain locks, quickly said no, and vanished into their sanctuaries before I could even say good afternoon.

I have met some beautiful souls and enjoyed some incredible moments. One day as I was making the rounds a small boy decided I needed to be adopted. He followed me around the neighborhood and introduced me to his friends. The sales were not big that day but I had a thoroughly fine time. Another day a sprightly old gentleman opened his door, listened to my introduction, and then asked if I had brought along my gun for protection. I replied I did not care for guns but that I did have a bow and arrow at home. I ended up meeting his wife and sister-in-law, and having a nice chat with three exceptional people. I wish people who consider growing old a sin which should be locked away from view could meet some of the elder citizens I have had a chance to know. They are incredible human beings with more dignity and wisdom than many of us will ever achieve. Of course, I have run into other types of people and less happy moments.

I have walked into buildings with hallways lined with garbage and apartments corroded by filth and negligence. The tenants were a visual monument to apathy brought on by grinding poverty. I did not make a sale at one apartment not because she did not want anything, but because it was financially impossible for her to purchase a three dollar broom. To see despair and hopelessness

is to realize that many do not share in our hopes and dreams.

I was being exposed to a few hard-core realities about our country and the way it deals with people. There are more than enough guns for every man, woman, and child in this land but there is obviously not enough food, housing, or education for too many of our fellow citizens.

Being a Fullerette has made me see beyond my own life by exposing me to the varied existence of other individuals. I ended up leaving the job but I doubt that I'll ever leave behind the impressions I have received. I would like to be able to see the woman who could not afford the broom and hear her say, "I'll have three of each please."

Sacrifice

by Richard DiNatale

The old Mexican church was dark and drafty. The few candles didn't hide the gloom and there were few silver or gold ornaments to throw darts of light through the oppressive air. All sun-light was blocked by the dirty brick walls; the air at the ceiling, thick like a stagnating mud pond. The odor of the old oaken seats hit us as we entered.

We would find each church the same in this brown country. Muraless walls and cheap stain glass windows. Wretchedly old and creaky seats and the gaudily painted saints in every dark corner. Always, in the center, a wooden crucifix with Christ painted over and over with a hundred coats of bright orange fleshtone and brilliant red blood spattered all over him. Exaggeratedly dripping down from his thorny crown, spilling from his wounds, his head hung down in anguish. And the people here always the same too. One never saw the Spanish who brought Christianity here long ago and bloodily erected it's cross across the continent. One only saw Indians shabby and dark.

Here today was only one Indian. Entering to one side, we hadn't seen her slouched and kneeling in the center aisle. Her eyes affixed to the cross, she slid slowly on her knees to it. Cracks ran through her skin like deep dried river beds. Behind her shawl and tautly pulled ahir, a look of patience and faith. Her eyes aflame now with hope. All her strength taking her unsteadily down the aisle past the sad, old, benches to her goal, the gaudily painted sacrifice; in his death to be born again, an old woman with nowhere to turn.

Leaving the church, we walked into the hot, trashy, Mexico City streets. Mark and I, long time friends and neighbors, now here four thousand miles from home taking in the sights.

"Let's go someplace interesting."

"How about the pyramids?"

We flagged down a taxi. Later a local bus full of caballeros and chickens brought us to the ruins of Tenochtitlan. Once the heart of the Aztec empire, here the great pyramids of the Sun and the Moon stood.

Approaching from a country road, the pyramids looked like two big, brown, dirt hills. They grew larger and more angular as we approached, till once at the base, they were tremendous and steep. At the pyramid of the Sun a few tourists were coming down from the long climb. Mark and I and a few other visitors began hopping up the huge, stone stairs. Tiring fast in the heat and altitude, we soon stopped to rest.

A young man approached us. He wore white, cotton pants and shirt with brown sandals. He had sharp, brown eyes that caught one's attention. The hot Mexican sun had wrinkled and cracked his forehead. Without introduction, he spoke to us.

"Going all the way up?"

"Yeah."

"Why?"

"Just to see what's up there."

We started off again, he talked as we climbed.

"This pyramid was a sacrificial altar, a huge stage built for the Sun to watch murders; just six hundred years ago, before the Spanish came."

"Yes we had heard that somewhere."

I whispered to Mark. "One of those fake tour-guides looking for some money."

We walked faster hoping to outclimb the boy. We had to stop again.

"The Spaniards had called Tenochtitlan the most beautiful city in the world, but its inhabitants bloody savages and devils. You see, before they came to impose their God on Mexico, the Sun was God here and demanded blood sacrifice."

Mark said, "The Spaniards called everyone savages?"

"No you don't understand", said the boy. "The victims were sometimes lined up for three miles."

"People will always find some crazy reason to kill other people", mark said; and we started climbing, the boy talking behind us.

"Exactly. But do you know the type of ceremony used? The one that made the Spainiards call them devils?

It was hotter now, we tired of the climb and of the boy.

"The sacrifice was long and gruel. The priests with long obsidian knives slashed out the still beating heart of the victim and threw it at the foot of the altar, the Sun watching all the while."

We grew tired rapidly in the hot, thin air. Many of the other tourists had stopped their climb, taken a few pictures and headed slowly down. we turned and looked at the boy.

"And do you know what they did with the hearts? he said. His face tight and sweaty, his near perfect English had fooled us, but we could see now that he was an Indian. "They ate them. Ate them there on the altar. Ate them raw to please the Sun God and renew their society for another year."

He stared. Looking around we saw that by now all the tourists had turned back. His grusome account annoyed us.

"What do you want? I said.

He smiled. "Have you seen much of my country?

"A little. And we don't need any guide."

He laughed. "You have the wrong idea. Tell me what you saw."

"A lot of brown dirt, and a lot of churches."

"And your're going to the top?

"Yes."

"Very few Americans make it to the top." He pointed to the people going down. "I climb it every day and still don't dare to take the last steps."

"Why?

"It is evil. They say that six hundred years of Sun and rain have not worn away the blood there."

"Nonsense."

"Here is where I stop and there is still a way to go. You don't belong here. This land is only leased to the white man, no matter what God brings you here. The Sun is still ruler here. All who forget this suffer."

The last stretch was long and hot. An uneasiness seemed to come up through the stones of the pyramid itself.

"Most of what he said about the sacrifice is true", Mark said.

"Yes it's history."

"Yes it's strange. If they were so savage why did they give up such a beautiful city; a whole country for that matter, without hardly a fight."

Yes, I thought, the land had been taken too easily. The Spanish had plundered and spoiled across a whole continent almost as a matter of course. Their power remained here now, their descendants held it. Mexico City stood twelve miles away to prove that. But the jungle had not crept up over Tenochtitlan either. And they say that six hundred years have not washed the altar clean. No, six hundred years had not washed anything clean as far as the Indians were concerned. And the new God had not solved anything either. No, instead the conquerors had come so swiftly they did not even know or understand the land they ruled, and strange, old Gods suddenly appeared all over the New World. I thought of the strange altars throughout my own country. The huge launch pads and rockets screaming for the moon. The sacrificial altar of Vietnam. The evil was here, before we came. It was waiting in the land itself. The Indians had known that and so dutifully raised their bloody knives to the Sun.

Now the steepness of the huge, stone stairs and the heat were unbearable. Stopping we could see the dry, brown hills, barren for miles except for adobe huts and cactus. The hot sun beat down on everything.

Here At Frog Lake

by Richard McLaughlin

The Magic Runes Of The Engraver Beetles

It won't be easy to leave Frog Lake; I don't even like to speak of it. But, we'll have to leave - that's certain. Sharleena has already started to carve new runes on her white birch walking stock. She carves in an ancient and mysterious language that she learned from a beetle. She learned more than a new language from those engraver beetles. Engraver beetles do the finest work in wood I've ever seen.

There is a stand of pine on the shores of Frog Lake that gets a lot of its magic from runes the beetles carved in a long-dead first generation pine. Beetle runes are as beautiful as they are useful. Then again, they are as useful as they are beautiful.

Editor's Note: This issue of Parnassus contains the concluding sections of the Richard McLaughlin story, Here At Frog Lake.

Where Am I?

I could go on to tell you more about the geese, what they look like, where they come from, and what they like to eat-things like that. But, before you know it, this would turn into a book about geese, and it is after all, a book about Frog Lake.

Frog Lake

Frog Lake

Frog Lake

Frog, Frog, Frog,

Lake, Lake, Lake,

Frog Lake!

I just thought I'd put that in so you wouldn't think I've forgotten what I'm talking about. This is a book about Frog Lake, and what it's like here and possibly why we're leaving.

I'd like to talk a little more about some of the things I've barely mentioned, like the Iron Frog. The Iron Frog floats in the center of Frog Lake like the hole in the center of a doughnut. If it wasn't for the hole in the center of a doughnut, it might not be a doughnut - it could be a cake. If it wasn't for the Frog in the center of Frog Lake, it might not be Frog Lake, it could be any Lake. Lake? Cake? Where are we? Where are they? Where am I? I'm at a lake and there's a huge Iron Frog floating in the center of it. I guess that clinches it. I know where I am going and you should too by now. If you don't, I'm not going to tell you.

The Beautiful Dance Of The Geese

The geese seemed to approve of us right away, still I was surprised and pleased when they suggested that Sharleena and I leave with them. Geese are really beautiful people - I especially love the way they dance. I have seen the geese often. But, I never really knew them until about three months ago, and I'm only beginning to understand them now. I would never even have gotten to know them if it wasn't for my friend Roger. Roger took me to the geese and introduced me to them as an old friend. That's a day I'll never forget. The geese taught me their way of speaking - we swapped stories, than we sang for each other. I would sing than the geese would sing. Sometimes they sang in chorus - sometimes one would sing all alone. It was all very beautiful, but the dancing is what stands out. They dance clear and sharp, like the light from the evening star. When they dance across the lake, their feet are like silver cymbals on the water. Then, two by two they rise into the air and dance with the wind. There's nothing quite like the sight of those geese dancing with the wind.

More About The Iron Frog

As I was saying, the Iron Frog floats in the center of Frog Lake.. It's difficult to think about a huge Iron Frog floating in the center of a lake. Iron is so heavy. I very seldom see it float, and this Iron Frog seems like it could never float - it's so huge. It's really very big. It's one and a half times taller than me, and it's so big around I could jump up and down on its back and not worry about falling off. Now that I think about, it's very mysterious that that Iron Frog floats like that - always in the center of the lake. It seems to me that the Frog would drift about like an old log, but it never moves. You might guess that the Frog is standing on the bottom of the Lake, but I don't know; Frog Lake is very, very deep. I didn't think they made frogs that tall. The more I think about it, the more I think about it. There must have been a powerful spell cast about that Frog years and years ago, maybe even before the beetles carved their runes in the long-dead first generation pine. There certainly seems like there's a lot of magic around Frog Lake, maybe even more than I thought.

I could talk about magic and spells, but I don't think I will. I'd rather talk about some of the people I've already mentioned, like Roger and Egg.

Two More Frog Lake People

When I say there are twelve of us here not counting me, two of those twelve people are Roger and Egg. I really can't talk about Roger and Egg at the same time. They're two different people. Roger is Roger, and Egg is Egg. The only thing they have in common is me. I am Roger's friend, and I am Egg's friend. But, Roger and Egg hardly know each other. They may become friends someday, but that's up to them. As it stands, I can only talk about one of them at a time, and as long as I've been talking about the geese, I may as well tell you a bit about Roger. Roger is a good person. He gets his magic from his cats and, of course, from the runes in his walking stick. I don't know whether he gets magic from his friends the geese or not. He probably does.

Maybe I've said enough about Roger. This is a Frog Lake book, not a people book. I don't want to get too deeply involved in people right now - not in this book anyway.

I still think it would be good to say a couple of things about Egg. Egg is a good and long-time friend. He gets a lot of his magic from music, a lot of us here get our magic from music. But, Egg has a special way about him. Music flows through him like sunlight through the green leaves of trees.

In a way, it was nice to talk about people for a while. I know they'll like it, but I really should get back to Frog Lake even though I haven't left yet. I guess that's what this is all about. It's a very delicate thing, writing about Frog Lake. Nobody really wants to leave here, especially me - and, here I am writing about it. I guess that may be why I keep writing about other things.

More About The Sunset Hills

I should really tell you more about Frog Lake - there's plenty to talk about. It seems to me that I've mentioned the Sunset Hills that surround Frog Lake, maybe I should tell you more about them. We call those hills the Sunset Hills because for the most part that's where the sun goes down, when it goes down. I guess those hills have been here as long as Frog Lake - maybe even longer. Those hills are beautiful, but they are also very strange, in their own way. The Sunset Hills are pretty big as far as hills go, but they will never be mountains. They're just rolling green hills. There aren't many trees there, but that's where we get our strawberries. Strawberries grow wild on the Sunset Hills- they are really tiny as strawberries go, but they are very sweet. I suspect there is a lot of magic in the Sunset Hills.

The Hills are covered with paths; so many that we'll never get to walk them all. And, all along the paths are deeply carved rune stones. Those rune stones are something else again. I've seen enough rune stones in my time, but never as many as can be found in the Sunset Hills; more rune stones than you could imagine -- more rune stones than you could count. I'm not exactly sure what those rune stones are all about. Some are ornately carved, some are elegant but simple, still others are made in the shapes of man. Rune stones like that are another thing altogether. As I think about it, those rune stones have a definite part to play in my dream - the bad one I mentioned earlier. People were sitting at the base of the Iron Frog looking up towards the Sunset Hills and the sun was setting, just as you might expect, but something was wrong - or at least different. The rune stones were glowing like blue points of light. I didn't know what to make of it. I still don't. It was all very mysterious in its own way.

Doing One Thing Or The Other

It's been a long time since I've had a chance to write anything in this Frog Lake book. I've been very busy lately doing other things. It seems like if you're doing one thing, you can't do the other. It doesn't really matter much - you just do what you can do. Now that I'm writing again there are more things I should tell you about. A lot has happened since the last time I wrote.

One particularly bright sunshiny day about two weeks ago, Sharleena and I were making our morning rounds watering the plants. We water the plants every morning before breakfast. We do it in a particular way. We have a pail that has a spout with tiny holes in it. It looks like it could have been made just to water plants, Sharleena found it near a rune stone in the Sunset Hills.

You have to be very careful about how you water plants here. I suppose that's true everywhere. There's a lot to learn about watering these plants. Some plants will die if you water them every day - some plants die if you don't. Some plants like to have water on their leaves, but some will turn to stone at the very thought of getting water on their leaves. The only way you can learn which plants need what and when, and which leaves like water and which leaves turn to stone, is to live with them. They will teach you. I have been living with the plants for a long time. I know the plants like Roger knows the geese.

Anyway, there we were walking from Frog Lake to the Sunset Hills with a pail that looks like it was made to water plants, when Sharleena said: "Look, a butterfly."

The Halloween Butterflies

I looked up and saw a beautiful butterfly with Halloween wings. It was a big butterfly, as butterflies go. It was black, orange and soft, and it cast tiny spells as it flew.

"Look again," she said. And, I turned and sure enough there was another Halloween butterfly a lot like the first, only it was orange, black and soft. They flew like the high fast notes of a magic violin.

As we walked along the path we saw more and more of those Halloween butterflies flying along like the high fast notes of a magic violin. After a while, we saw one flying right towards us. It was a little different. It flew like the high fast notes of a magic flute, and it landed right on Sharleena's shoulder.

"Hello, Sharleena!" it said, with a voice like silver bells. I didn't know what was going on at first, but it didn't take me long to figure it out. Sharleena and that high flying, magic flute, Halloween butterfly were old friends. They had been good friends for a long time. Sharleena and that butterfly were good friends way back when Sharleena was following the river and that big Halloween butterfly was just a little brown, fuzzy, orange caterpillar. They were making up for lost time saying things like, "Where've you been?" and "My, don't you look nice."

After a while they remembered I was there and Sharleena introduced us to each other. That butterfly's name was Shiwhan. I said that Shiwhan was a beautiful name, especially for a magic-flute Halloween butterfly, and Shiwhan said that that was a nice thing for me to say. We started again on that Sunset Hill's path while Shiwhan told us about the flight of the butterflies.

The Flight Of The Butterflies

It seems that every year the Halloween butterflies band together in a loosely knit small circle of friends and fly to the dark side of the moon, to celebrate Halloween. The dark side of the moon is a good place to celebrate Halloween, especially if you are a Halloween Butterfly. But, it's a long way to fly and the butterflies have to leave early if they expect to make it to the moon on time. The moon is an especially good place to cast spells, most especially if you are a Halloween butterfly and it's Halloween.

Well, Shiwhan and the other Halloween butterflies had a long, high flight ahead of them so they couldn't stay long, but Sharleena insisted that they stay for lunch, so that we could celebrate the reunion properly.

Getting Ready For A Special Good-bye Lunch

The butterflies floated down the hill like a big, lazy, black-orange, soft cloud, and Sharleena and I went off into the Sunset Hills to gather strawberries and blueberries and whatever for lunch. Whatever is anything else you might find that's especially good for lunch - it could be carrots or raspberries, but we wanted to surprise the Halloween butterflies, so we figured the best whatever for them would be flowers. I gathered wine-purple and white, smooth lilacs and Sharleena found lilies-of-the-valley and sweet buttercups, which she knew were Shihwans favorites. After gathering the flowers we went to the usual places to pick the blueberries and strawberries. When we got everything all together we headed back down to the shores of Frog Lake to meet Shiwhan and the others. Some of the other Frog Lake people were there. Some I've told you about and some I haven't. Bruce was there, and he had been talking to the butterflies. He knew we were all going to have lunch together, so he made white roses glazed with cinnamon, and put them out on a silver tray, just for the occasion. Priscilla was there and so were Mike and Egg. They were all working together to cast a magic-music spell. When they were done we would have high-flying magic flute and magic violin music all day long in honor of our friends, the Halloween Butterflies.

Jeanny and Wynn were hanging beautiful hand-sewn black-soft and orange banners from the flower trees around the lake and Marion was sitting with Roger and his magic cats, writing a speech of welcome and farewell. I knew it was going to be a nice lunch.

When everything was ready, everybody came to our eating meadow, just as if they had been called. Everybody came - even the geese. The last to come were our old friends, Donald and Mary Ellen. They came laughing into the meadow, carrying a big basket

Getting Ready For A Special Good-bye Lunch (Cont.)

filled with peach blossoms and nectarines. Of course, the butterflies were everywhere.

It was a long and especially beautiful lunch that lasted far into the evening. When the sun was setting on the Sunset Hills like a big slow fire-flower, you could still see some people licking honey and cinnamon glaze from white roses. As it grew darker, the magic music grew faint and we all drifted into sleep by the still waters of Frog Lake.

Happy-Sad and Plum Island

When we awoke, the sun was high and Shiwhan and the Halloween butterflies were gone. They were somewhere between Frog Lake and the dark side of the moon, casting spells as they flew.

We were all happy-sad, happy because it had been such a fine lunch, and sad because our friends the butterflies were gone, and now we knew it was surely time for us to make our own leaving plans.

Sharleena and I walked over to the quiet edge of Frog Lake where Roger and a big black-necked goose were talking. They were talking about a place called Plum Island. I asked them if it was an island with a big Iron Plum in the center of it, but they said no. It was an island with real plums growing happy and wild all over it. An island with blue-green water and brown-white sand. I said it sounded beautiful. The big black-necked goose said he was glad I liked it because that would be our next home if we hadn't changed our minds about going with them.

Sharleena smiled as I looked at her and we both laughed as we said, "When do we leave?"

A lot of things will make you happy-sad. I had been more or less just plain sad at the thought of leaving Frog Lake, but now new thoughts of a brown and white sandy island with wild plums growing happily all over it danced through my head. Plum Island, Plum Island, Plum Island. Yes, I liked the sound of that place. Of fourse, I was still sad about leaving the magic of Frog Lake and the people there, but Plum Island would have magic of it's own, and the geese said there would be some especially nice people there too.

It would be a few days before we would have to leave, but we have a saying here at Frog Lake, "The days pass like water through", and I knew they would.

Happy-Sad and Plum Island (Cont.)

Within two days, the leaves began to fall from all the trees, the green grass had all turned brown and the last of the flowers turned in upon themselves.

Sharleena and I were ready to leave, and Egg had already left. Egg had followed the sun the night of our Halloween Butterfly lunch. He was last seen heading west over the Sunset Hills. The others were just about ready to leave, although some still weren't sure where they would go.

We're On Our Way

On the third day, the geese woke us with their flying-song - our time had come. The geese ate a quiet and last breakfast out on Frog Lake and Sharleena and I went quietly about the business of putting our smooth and simple good-bye stones under the pillows of our still sleeping friends, just as Egg had done a few days before. Roger and Marion walked out of the deep pine glade and the geese rose into the still air with their almost silent flying song. We smiled at Roger and Marion and looked up at the Sunset Hills. Sure enough, the rune stones were glowing like blue points of light, and I thought I noticed just a bit of dust in the air as we turned to follow the geese. We were on our way.

